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OPERATIONAL LOGISTICS FOR THE NEXT SOMALIA? - CHALLENGES IN  
SUB-SAHARAN WEST AFRICA

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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16 June 1995

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Abstract of

OPERATIONAL LOGISTICS FOR THE NEXT SOMALIA? - CHALLENGES IN  
SUB-SAHARAN WEST AFRICA

This paper develops a hypothetical United Nations sanctioned international military mission to provide security for the delivery of humanitarian aid into the interior of West Africa. It suggests that the current political, demographic, climatic, and economic conditions in the Sahel region of Sub-Saharan West Africa may be working together to create a situation similar to that which existed in Somalia in 1992. Using experiences and lessons derived from the Somali relief mission OPERATION RESTORE HOPE, a West African relief mission is postulated and examined primarily, but not exclusively, in terms of operational logistics and sustainment principles, requirements, capabilities and limitations. This specific examination could be useful for a future commander as he plans for a similar mission. The paper suggests that armed forces can best contribute to regional political objectives by limiting military participation to providing impartial protection for the delivery of humanitarian relief and concludes that Unified Commanders should anticipate such missions in the future.

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## PREFACE

A series of excerpts from "future" articles and documents are presented to examine a possible Somalia-type humanitarian aid security mission in West Africa, primarily from an operational logistics perspective. It is hoped that the use of this method helps to emphasize that in the future such a mission is possible, operational logistics may limit mission options, regional political conditions surrounding any relief effort may be very complex, and mission success may best be assured by separating humanitarian from political objectives and by focusing on the former.

In setting the stage for OPERATION BRIGHT FUTURE, conditions of political instability, economic hardship, and human suffering are attributed to specific West African countries. The political attributions should not be viewed as a prediction of future conditions for these countries in particular, but rather as a continuation of the general political trends since the independence movement swept the region in the early 1960's. The specific trends of population growth and "desertification" beyond the sustained capacity of the land to support the inhabitants of the Sahel are real.

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# OPERATIONAL LOGISTICS FOR THE NEXT SOMALIA? - CHALLENGES IN SUB-SAHARAN WEST AFRICA

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

**From CIA Report, *West African Sahel Food Production and Distribution Forecast*, June 1996.**

The Sahel Region of West Africa is the geographic area that includes the countries Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. The region faces climatic and population trends that cause concern that available food supplies will not support the people living there. The Sahara Desert continues to creep to the south, a situation made worse by the failure of the region's farmers to use more effective and efficient agricultural methods. Farming techniques in use are actually increasing the rate of the desertification of Northern Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad. Added to the trend of the reduction of arable land is the region's annual population growth rate of 2.5 to 3.5 percent. These two trends have continued unabated since the early 1980's. The northern Sahel nations continue to show reductions in per capita food production with Mauritania and Niger dropping consistently at rates greater than 2 percent each year since 1980.<sup>1</sup>

With the exceptions of coastal Senegal and Mauritania, the Sahel nations have depended and continue to depend on local food production to meet food requirement. Mauritania produces only 20 percent of the food it needs, relying on imports and aid to make up the difference. Senegal normally produces 60 percent of its food requirements. In contrast, the landlocked regions of the Sahel on average produce nearly 90 percent of food locally consumed,<sup>2</sup> although wide variations in annual harvests cause this number to fluctuate.

Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger together have only 4,500 miles of paved roads and less than 35,000 commercial vehicles to serve a combined population of 30 million.<sup>3</sup> Much of the road system serves foreign economic interests and has been planned and built with little concern for broad regional economic development.<sup>4</sup> The underdeveloped transportation infrastructure places a severe constraint on the region's efforts to pass beyond the agrarian stage of development and limits the ability to readily import and distribute large amounts of grains and cereals to make up a sustained production shortfall in the future. This is a special concern in the regions of the Sahel where the current population already exceeds the capacity of the land (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>



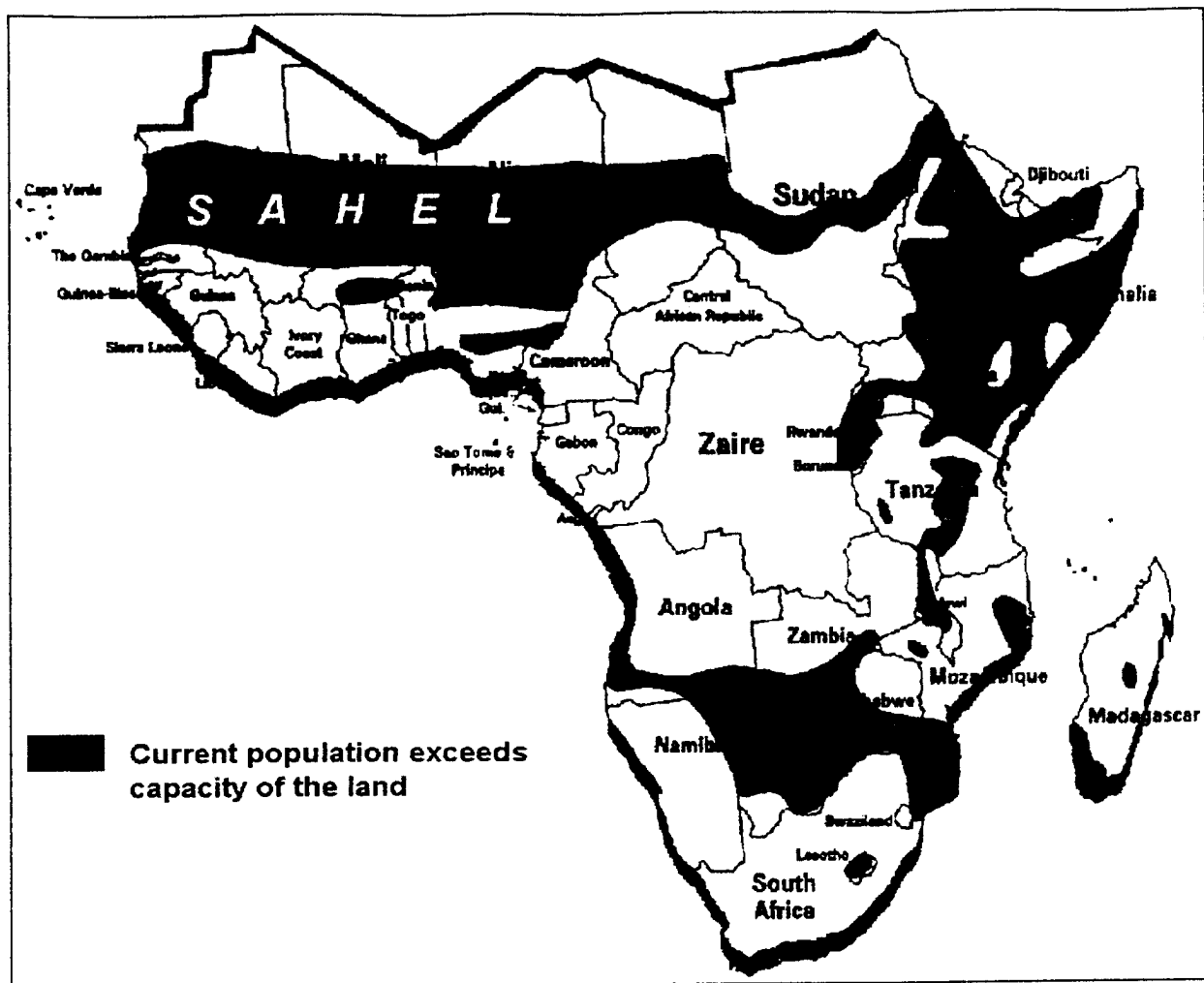


Figure 1 - Sub-Saharan African Regions where Population Exceeds Land Capacity

## CHAPTER II

### OPERATIONAL LOGISTICS FOR WEST AFRICAN RELIEF

*From "The Tragedy of the African Sahel," Time Cover Story, October 5, 1998*

The CNN pictures of death and starvation were stark reminders of another African tragedy not less than a decade earlier. The images of the weak and helpless West African mothers holding dying children were viewed around the world.

The three year drought has hit in the region of Africa known as the Sahel (Figure 2), encompassing vast interior expanses of the sub-Sahara between the Atlantic on the west and the Sudan to the east. The flow of the normally broad Niger River, lifeblood to much of the region, has been reduced to a trickle, creating famine and starvation. While the entire Sahel has suffered, the greatest tragedy is centered in the interior nations of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, where the World Health Organization estimates that 300,000 have already died of starvation. Another 3 million inhabitants are believed near starvation and 8 million suffering the effects of malnutrition.

The magnitude of the tragedy has overwhelmed the fledgling democracies of these three hardest hit countries. In April, the

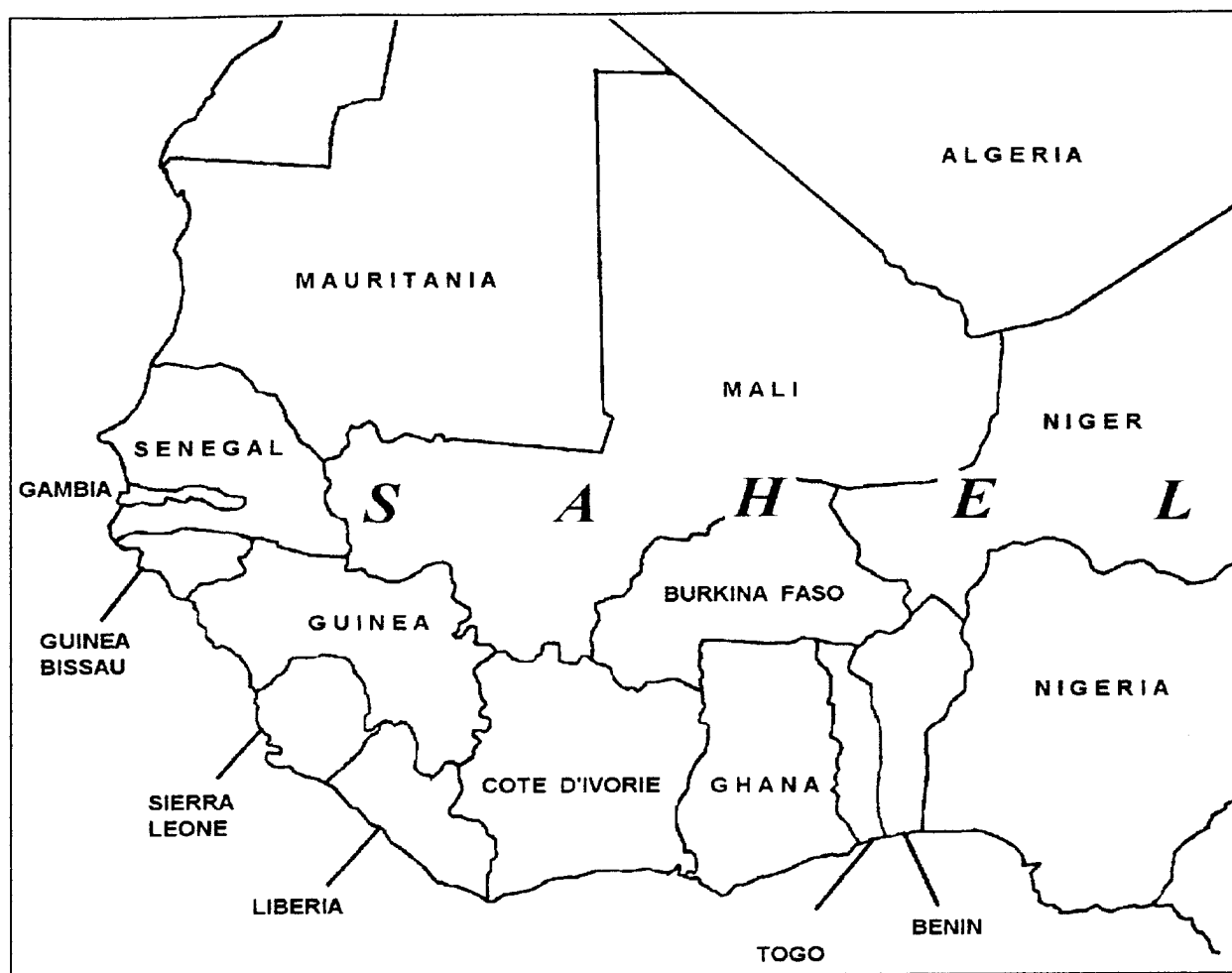


Figure 2 - West African Sahel

democracy that had ruled Mali since 1992 collapsed in a military coup. Since then, the new military government has been unable to establish its control much beyond the capital of Bamako while Islamic fundamentalist Tuareg tribesmen dominate the country to the north.<sup>6</sup> In Burkina Faso, the limited democracy that has been in place since the early 1990's still retains control of the country, but it has been unable to stop hundreds of thousands of

refugees from streaming into neighboring Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. Ghana's military government closed its Burkina Faso border in June. Border clashes continue as desperate Burkinabe refugees have ignored the possible dangers when faced with the certainty of starvation at home. Four refugee camps in Cote d'Ivoire are packed with an estimated 800,000 Malis and Burkinabes.

The political conditions created by the famine in Niger are the worst in the region. Reminiscent of Somalia, the democracy instituted in 1993 collapsed last spring as rival groups continue to wrestle for control of the capital, Niamey. In the north, Tuaregs rule much of the arid countryside, using control of the meager food supplies as their growing source of power. The governments in Nigeria and Benin have closed their borders to refugees from Niger, creating a string of poorly supplied refugee camps along the Niger River.

Massive relief efforts by the lead agencies, the World Food Program (WFP) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)<sup>7</sup> have managed to minimize the suffering in the effected coastal countries, Senegal and Mauritania. Political instability and violence have largely prevented more than a trickle of relief supplies to reach the Sahel interior, a region already burdened with a transportation system best described as primitive. This

has led to calls in the United Nations for another Somalia-style relief effort, the loudest calls coming from France and Italy.

In the United States, while the memories of Somalia and the eighteen Americans killed in that relief effort remain strong, polls indicate that the recent avalanche of vivid, graphic, and heart-wrenching reports from Africa has moved public opinion. The most recent CNN/USA Today poll shows 70 percent of Americans now support some form of military intervention to provide and protect food deliveries to the region, up from 33 percent in June. The Administration is reported to be pressing the Pentagon for possible options to help ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid. Pentagon officials, while reluctant to get involved in the political troubles of the region, recall that OPERATION RESTORE HOPE, the first phase of US involvement in Somalia, is generally credited with ending the starvation in the Horn of Africa.<sup>8</sup>

***From EUCOM J-4 Staff Estimate, October 1998***

Analysis of Course of Action Three - Conduct joint and combined military operations in West Africa to secure major air and sea ports, key installations and food distribution points, to provide open and free passage of relief supplies, to provide security for convoys and relief organization operations and assist UN/NGOs in providing humanitarian relief under UN auspices.<sup>9</sup>

## Humanitarian Relief Logistics Overview

Three key constraints define the possible seaborne bulk humanitarian relief aid delivery lines of communication to Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

1. Existing Overland Transport Infrastructure from the Sea (Figure 3).<sup>10</sup> Mali's primary accesses to the sea are through the ports of Dakar, Senegal and Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. A rail line and an unpaved parallel motor vehicle road connect Dakar with the Mali capital, Bamako (distance 680 miles). Motor vehicle roads, with some sections unpaved, connect Bamako with Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire. Burkina Faso's primary access to the sea is through Abidjan. A rail line connects Abidjan with the Burkina Faso capital, Ouagadougou (distance 630 miles) with an intermediate stop at the second largest city, Bobo-Dioulasso (distance 430 miles from Abidjan). Paved motor vehicle roads also connect the three cities. Niger's primary accesses to the sea are through the ports of Abidjan; Cotonou, Benin; and Lagos, Nigeria. There are no railroads in Niger. Paved motor vehicle roads connect the Nigerien capital, Niamey, with the Burkina Faso railhead at Ouagadougou, the Benin railhead at Parakou, and Lagos.<sup>11</sup>

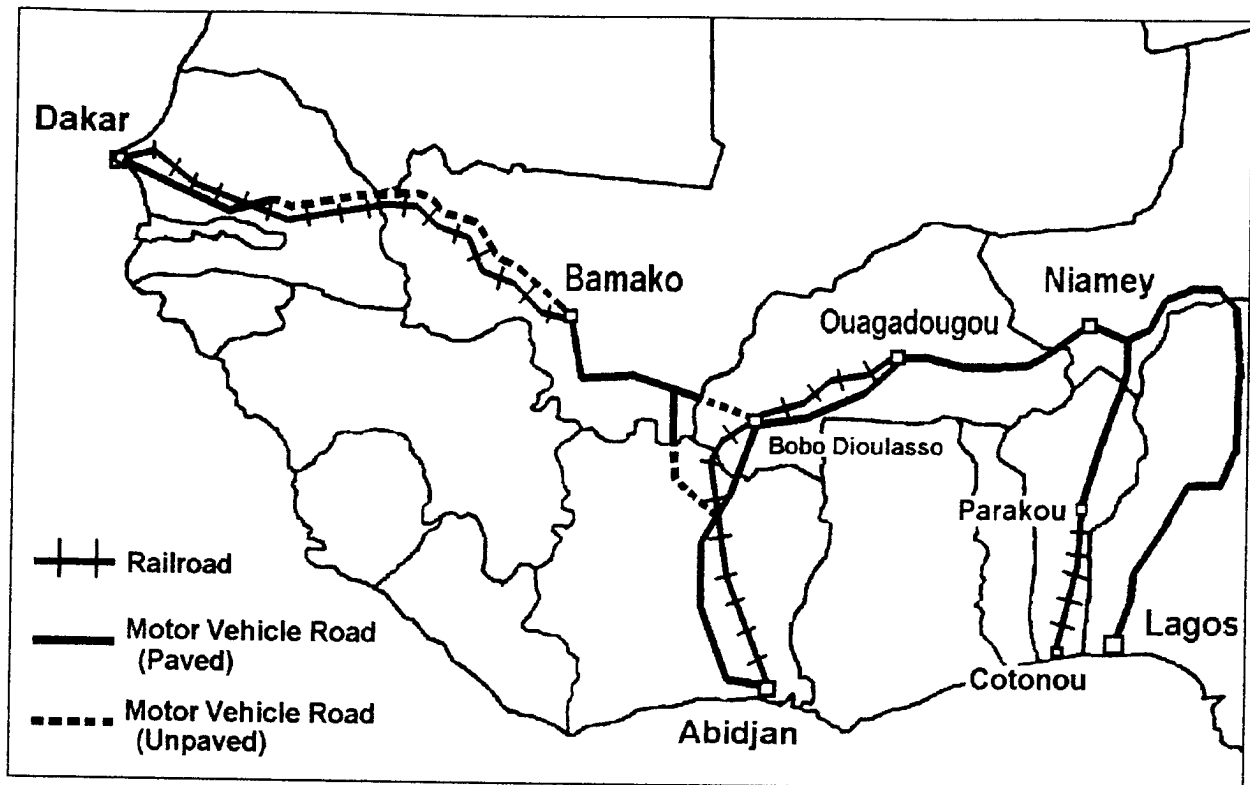


Figure 3 - Port Access for Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger

2. Regional Political Considerations. The political situations in Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria make the risks of using these countries for overland transport into Niger less acceptable than using Cote d'Ivoire. Benin and Nigeria may be unavailable for political reasons.

3. Inland Distribution Centers. Bamako, Mali; Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso; and Niamey, Niger have the best available municipal infrastructures to support internal distribution networks for their respective countries. These cities also have airports capable of supporting C-17 airlift.<sup>12</sup>

The ports of Dakar and Abidjan are two of the best available on the West Coast of Africa.<sup>13</sup> Dakar has 10,000 meters of total quay length and can handle ships with drafts of up to 10 meters. Dakar has three container berths, two Role-On/Roll-Off berths, and seven tanker terminal berths.<sup>14</sup> Abidjan has 25 berths with a 3130 meter main quay with depths of at least 10 meters. Abidjan has four container berths, one of which is equipped with a Role-On/Role-Off ramp, and two tanker terminal berths.<sup>15</sup> The WFP and ICRC have used Dakar and Abidjan as the debarkation ports for relief attempts to the famine areas. Both organizations have established strong relations with the governments of Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire, primarily through their French representatives.

The WFP projects that 50,000 tons of humanitarian aid per month will need to pass through Dakar for delivery to Mali, and that 80,000 tons of aid per month will need to pass through Abidjan for delivery to Burkina Faso and Niger. The WFP projects that the aid will need to be sustained for approximately six months to alleviate the present crisis.

#### Joint Task Force Logistics

COA Three will require sealift sustainment for mission accomplishment. The ports of Dakar and Abidjan can accommodate MPS shipping; APS Hospital, Sealift Tanker, and Freighters; and



virtually all RRF shipping. Neither port can accommodate the APS LASH ships.<sup>16</sup> Considerable host nation support and mature infrastructures are available at both ports.<sup>17</sup> The use of facilities for the receipt, storage, and issue of bulk fuel and bulk water will need to be negotiated as well as facilities and procedures for the receipt, storage, and transport of ammunition.

The military logistics distribution centers in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger should be located in the cities planned to house humanitarian relief distribution centers; Bamako, Bobo-Dioulasso, Ouagadougou, and Niamey. Humanitarian and military logistics would share overland lines of communication from the ports to the inland distribution centers.

Because of the distance between available ports, the desire to simplify operational command and control and operational protection for the overland lines of communication argue for using a single port of debarkation to support the entire operation. This assumes necessary forces can be supported through that port. Options for using two ports might involve the use MPS assets from two squadrons, one for each port; division of MPS assets from a single squadron between both ports; or the use MPS assets at only one port, thereby delaying the immediate relief effort from the other port. Strategic and theater airlift

logistic support will be required for any forces initially deployed directly into Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger until sustained logistics support can be developed along lines of communication from Dakar and/or Abidjan.

***From "UN Mandated Force Seeks to Halt Tragedy in Sahel," UN Chronicle, Jan-Mar 1999.***

Distressed by the disease and starvation in the West African interior created by years of drought and famine made worse by political chaos, the Security Council on 3 December called for the use of "all necessary means" to secure the delivery of humanitarian aid to the starving people of the Sahel.

In unanimously adopting resolution 978 (1998), the Council sanctioned the use of force under Chapter VII to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid for only the third time. The first such mandate was for Somalia in 1992, followed by the Sri Lankan crisis in 1996. While recognizing that a trend in humanitarian aid protection mandates under Chapter VII had now been firmly established, the Council stated that "the magnitude of the suffering of the peoples of West Africa transcends that of all previous disasters addressed by this body." The resolution cited "widespread violations of international law and attacks on impartial humanitarian relief workers in Mali, Burkina Faso, and

Niger” and stated that parties hindering the delivery of food and relief supplies would “be held strictly accountable.”

The crisis in West Africa marked the first time that two nations would direct separate areas of operations within a single UN-mandated operation. The Secretary-General accepted offers from France and the United States to develop separate, combined task forces to conduct separate operations in Mali and Burkina Faso/Niger respectively. Member States contributing to the international forces were authorized to develop unified command and control for those forces. The French took the lead for the UNOMAL forces operating in Mali and Senegal, while the United States led the UNOBURN forces in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Cote d'Ivoire in its mission known as OPERATION BRIGHT FUTURE.

The Council also invited the Secretary-General and his West African Special Representative to continue efforts for political settlements in the region.

***From “US EUCOM Joins In - Operation Bright Future,” Joint Force Quarterly, Fall 1999.***

The decision to divide the theater of operations into two areas of operation recognized the advantages of establishing two, widespread logistics bases in Dakar and Abidjan. While it would have been possible for the American military forces to take the

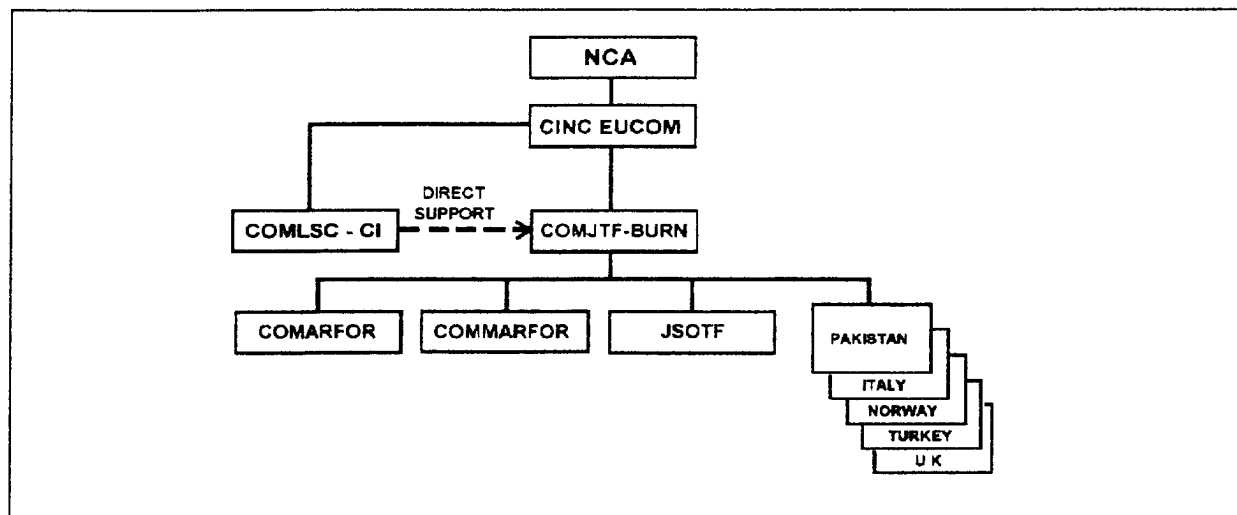
lead in both areas, JCS was hesitant to draw on forces that it felt were otherwise needed to support the two MRC contingency requirement. The French government, having long standing interests in the region, accepted the lead in what was considered the less complex mission, the relief operation in Mali.

Operational protection for OPERATION BRIGHT FUTURE was primarily ensured by convincing the regional governments, political leaders, and armed factions that the mission objective was the impartial delivery of humanitarian aid. Significant effort was applied to this aspect of the operation before and during its execution. Reducing the overland lines of communication to the minimum necessary was designed to facilitate operational protection using force under the Chapter VII mandate if necessary.

Logistics Support. In December 1998, US European Command (US EUCOM) became the focal point for building the United States led international coalition that would operate as part of UNOBURN. Following the example of UNITAF support by US Central Command, a coalition working group was formed to track international contributions and a Joint Logistics Working Group was established under the EUCOM J-4 to track combined support requirements. Especially important to this process were the contributions of

the representatives the Cote d'Ivoire Ministries of Defense and Interior who provided up-to-date information concerning host country support capabilities and planning liaison.

To provide direct logistics support to COMJTF-BURN, EUCOM immediately established the Logistics Support Command - Cote d'Ivoire (LSC-CI) in Abidjan to coordinate joint and combined logistics movement in area. LSC-CI was staffed with personnel from EUCOM J-4, II MEF, XVIII Corps, 10th Mountain, and other supported units, with liaison officers from Cote d'Ivoire, France, and coalition partners. LSC-CI remained under the operational control of EUCOM and provided direct support to COMJTF-BURN (Figure 4). Once established, LSC-CI assumed COMJTF-BURN's operational level deployment responsibilities, working directly with USTRANSCOM for the CJTF.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 4 - OPERATION BRIGHT FUTURE Chain-of-Command**

After the II MEF MAGTF secured advanced bases in Bobo-Dioulasso, Ouagadougou, and Niamey, LSC-CI detachments were co-located with the JTF regional commanders in those cities. LSC-CI coordinated port debarkation of material and supplies between the services and coalition partners, while maintaining a liaison with the relief agencies and the Abidjan Port Authority regarding pier scheduling. LSC-CI also served as COMJTF-BURN's coordinating agent for military and humanitarian rail shipments and overland convoys from Abidjan into the interior and between advanced bases. LSC-CI and the detachments coordinated humanitarian and military airlift schedules with EUCOM, USTRANSCOM, relief agencies, and Cote d'Ivoire officials. The separate LSC-CI command and staff remained in Abidjan, allowing COMJTF-BURN and his staff to move their headquarters to Ouagadougou to direct forward operations and determine forward logistic needs.

Following the II MEF MAGTF deployment to Bobo-Dioulasso, Ouagadougou, and Niamey, and the securing of the advanced bases, Army units led by the 10th Mountain Division deployed into the African interior along with units from Pakistan, Italy, Denmark, Turkey, and the UK. The MAGTF withdrew from the area of operations after reloading their MPS squadron, leaving only a security force in Abidjan. The MAGTF's 30-day, self-contained

supply support made possible the rapid deployment of the entire JTF. The flexibility and rapid response of the MAGTF using the MPS concept again proved to be an invaluable asset to the CINC and the JTF commander.

Strategic airlift, and in particular the C-17, proved once more to be indispensable to a humanitarian mission. USTRANSCOM airlift assets supported not only OPERATION BRIGHT FUTURE, but also many of the strategic lift requirements of the French led UNOMAL forces for the relief operation in Mali.

## CONCLUSION

***From "Logistics in the Sahel Relief Operation - Lessons Relearned?," Naval War College Review, Spring 2000.***

Prior to employing military forces, both the French and American governments had committed to ending military operations in West Africa when the humanitarian relief objectives were achieved, independent of the conclusion of comprehensive regional political settlements. This continued the termination pattern for multinational military missions supporting humanitarian relief efforts that began in Somalia. Military forces have proved to be an effective tool in creating a secure environment for the *impartial* delivery of humanitarian aid during a crisis of limited duration. But as Morgenthau and Thompson concluded, military power alone "cannot rule what it has conquered; for it cannot gain voluntary acceptance for its rule."<sup>19</sup> Even in the 21st century, diplomacy remains superior to military force as a method for third party intervention into internal civil disputes.

Eccles suggested that operations are "a combination of tactical and logistic action that are blended to serve the purpose of strategy."<sup>20</sup> Recent experiences argue that logistic action should get top billing when the strategic aim is the protection of humanitarian relief efforts. The logistics



capabilities of the United States, specifically strategic airlift and MPS, ensured the required rapid response in West Africa. The use of the Somali UNITAF command concept for UNOBURN greatly simplified logistics structure, planning and execution. The key elements of a logistic system were once again proven to be secure lines of communication; usable seaports, bases and airports; units responsible for operating the ports and bases; and host nation support structure available in theater.<sup>21</sup> Some lessons previously learned may need to be relearned following OPERATION BRIGHT FUTURE. Logistics intelligence is critical in the development of the concept of support. Interior transportation and service infrastructure needed extensive engineering support. Coalition support guidelines remain vague, helping to create late breaking support requirements from coalition partners.

Operational logistics and sustainment considerations defined the feasibility limits when selecting the course of action for the security support mission in the Sahel. Unified Theater Commanders should closely monitor political and environmental conditions that may precipitate similar missions and anticipate associated logistics limitations. They must continue to examine and address those limitations so they may be ready when next called upon to provide humanitarian relief delivery support.

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